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Mayfield sailor is memorialized at Normandy Cemetery

By BERRY CRAIG

COLLEVILLE-SUR-MER, France -- Shadrach Boaz of Mayfield, Ky., went down with his landing craft off Omaha Beach on D-Day

"His body was never found," said Sam Boaz of Paducah, Ky., the ensign's brother. Shadrach Boaz died at age 23.

Ensign Boaz was not forgotten by his family or by his country. A stout block of white marble honors the sailor at Highland Park Cemetery in Mayfield.

The western Kentuckian is also remembered in the Garden of the Missing, part of the Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial near Colleville-sur-Mer. The hallowed ground carpeted with neatly mowed Kentucky Bluegrass overlooks "Bloody Omaha" and the English Channel.

The names of Boaz and 1,556 other U.S. soldiers, sailors and airmen are chiseled on the gray stone Wall of the Missing. Another 9,387 military dead from D-Day and other World War II battles are buried beneath white marble Latin

Crosses and Stars of David in the cemetery, where the opening scene of the popular movie *Saving Private Ryan* was filmed.

Time and tides have washed away the blood of 2,200 Americans who were killed or wounded at Omaha Beach, a four-mile stretch of Normandy sand and sea-smoothed pebbles. Heavily-defended Omaha was the deadliest of the five Allied invasion beaches on D-Day, June 6, 1944.

Below the cliff top cemetery, the U.S. First Infantry Division -- the storied "Big Red One" -- stormed ashore against the Germans. Part of the 29th Infantry Division and Army Rangers battled the enemy on the western end of Omaha Beach. "My brother was on an LCT, a Landing Craft Tank," said Boaz, an attorney.

Shadrach Boaz was a veteran of U.S. landings in North Africa and Italy. "Then he was sent to England for D-Day," Sam Boaz said.

LCTs were crewed by 2 officers and 14 to 15 sailors for the Normandy invasion, the largest amphibious attack in history. The sturdy steel boat -- about 32-feet-wide and 114-feet long -- could carry four to eight tanks or self-propelled guns and beach them via a bow ramp.

On D-Day, Boaz was assistant officer-in-charge of LCT 197, part of Flotilla 18. The boat was to land self-propelled guns and gunners of the 58th Armored Field Artillery in support of the 29th Infantry, according to a July 10, 1944, navy report describing the loss of LCT 197.

Boaz's craft tried to land at 10 a.m., "but was prevented from doing so by underwater obstacles and heavy fire," explained the report, written by Lt. Cmdr. A. Hays, Flotilla 18 commander. LCT 197 struck a mine, which exploded.

"Terrific concussions were felt aboard, and the seams of the craft were split open...", Hays added. "The after section began to fill with water and the craft listed badly to port."

The blast knocked out two of LCT 197's three diesel engines. The landing craft limped toward a repair tug as the crew manned hand pumps to keep the boat afloat. Sailors on the tug tried to save LCT 197 with their larger pumps. "After ninety minutes of pumping, the repair tug was ordered to another area," the report says.

Undaunted, LCT 197's skipper, Ensign W. Whitney, tried to reach the beach three more times, but to no avail. "All attempts to secure aid were futile," the report said.

Whitney was determined at least to save the soldiers and their much-needed firepower. He turned the LCT seaward to transfer its cargo to a larger Landing Ship Tank, an LST in navy lingo. The soldiers got off, the report said, but without their big guns, each of which was mounted on a tank chassis.

Finally, at 8:35 p.m., LCT 197's lone working engine sputtered to a stop.

"The afterdeck on the port side was inundated," the report stated. Twenty minutes later, "the ship was abandoned with its complete load aboard. The craft turned over to port almost immediately and sank slowly, approximately four miles off Omaha Beach. One officer remains unaccounted for; all other personnel survived."

The missing officer was Ensign Shadrach Whitis Boaz, serial number 0-226983, United States Naval Reserve.



This article was written in 1989 and published in the *Hickman County Gazette*.

Wolf Island is also known as Island Number Five. A Supreme Court Decision was required to determine if the area belonged to Kentucky or to Missouri. Kentucky won. However, in 1917, the Mississippi River at Columbus froze and when it thawed, it cut a channel on the Kentucky side, replacing the previous channel the Missouri shore. Today Wolf Island actually is attached to Missouri; however, it officially is Kentucky soil and the state supplies teachers for those living on it.

School days on Wolf Island

(Dear Editor:

I was asked to write this for my grandchildren and the great-grandchildren. If you have space and feel that it is suitable for publication you are welcome to use it.

I am a retired teacher of Carlisle County having received a B.S. Degree in Primary Education from M.S.U. in the days when it was a Teachers College. My 30 years of service was spent in Hickman and Carlisle Counties.
Hazel Byassee Geveden.)

In the year of 1931 and '32 I had the interesting experience of teaching school on the

now almost forgotten spot called Wolf Island. As we all know, it belongs to Kentucky and therefore I was hired and paid by the Hickman County Board of Education for the fabulous sum of \$59.59 per month. At that time, the Island was a beautiful and prosperous farming area of more than seven hundred acres so I was told. What it is like today, I do not know but then It's growth of trees and small vegetation cannot be described.

On Sunday afternoon, I stepped into a motor boat at the old Columbus landing. Whoever was the pilot of that rig, I do not remember but I had faith in his ability to take me to my destination, and a higher faith to overcome any hidden obstacles on the way. I can still feel the quiver of my whole being-equal to the pulse of that huge motor beneath us. We sped over the water in a diagonal line, going South yet nearing the Missouri side. It was good to feel me feet on solid ground and I did not mind the rough pathway one mile to the place where I was to "Board." The family was Maymie and Roy Green, their two children, Roy Jr. and Carol, ages six and seven, Maymie's two grown brothers, Frank and George Wright lived with them, also her sister Annie Lee Jackson, husband, Carl and son, Malcolm, ages six or seven. So-there was much activity, happiness and good will in this large and spacious house built by Maymie and Annie Lee's father who was a big landowner of the Island. The house was built high

above the ground because of floods which came every Spring. A big porch circled all of the front and partly on the West side – a wonderful spot to enjoy the Missouri breezes.

On Monday morning the children and I with sack lunches, new “tablets” and pencils trekked off to the little school house. It was at the end of a wooded lane but part of our journey was through a cornfield and a not-so-lovely cockle-burr patch. The school house – I can see it now, was also built with “high heels” but it was neat and like all other little one-roomers. Outside was a pump well for our drinking needs and not far away near the alder bushes was the little “John.” Inside the school house was swept clean and the two rows of seats and desks were firmly screwed to the floor. Up front in the usual spot was the teacher’s desk and chair. There was a good chalk board and I was glad for most of my teaching would evolve from that.

The enrollment of the student body was the big number of ten. The three who came with me, Mary Ellen and Elizabeth Wren, three Massey children and Mildred and Craig Ford, all ages six to eleven. The mothers were there for that first hour. I felt their eyes upon my every movement and their inquisitive looks as to what I said or didn’t say. I was very uncomfortable but determined not to let it show. My aim and purpose was to win their good will and that of the children.

After they left I breathed a sigh of relief – glad to have my children to myself. The day was spent in getting acquainted, learning their full names; ages, their likes and dislikes and how well they could adapt to new games or enjoy the old ones. That first day was over but I realized with mixed emotions that it was only the beginning, more were to come, and they did. Each day was filled with many learning situations.

Friday never seemed so welcome as I once again climbed into the motor boat and knew that I was heading for good old Kentucky for the weekend. I pause here to tell you that the numerous times I crossed that river, each trip seemed as treacherous as before, I never overcame that fear of traveling on water.

Back to the Island; there were many school days. Some were fair, some were ideal and there were rainy days and cold days and on these days, we were taken to school in a farm wagon drawn by horses. Some one of the family would come for us at 3:30. How good it was to be home again. In the dining room was a long table which was the central gathering place at noon time. There were extra hired hands for the corn harvest and other things and even at our late hour of getting home, we could sense the happy and busy atmosphere that permeated that room and all the good food that had been served. We had our supper early and the rest of the day was ours. The family ate after the

chores were done and we all "listened" to Amos and Andy on the radio. There were no T.V.'s then.

In the autumn, friends of family would come over from Columbus and "bird hunt." All day the women folks would be making desserts, salads, and fancy bread. The men prepared the birds for the Bar-b-que pit and near sunset time, we would feast on all this. The best meat in the world! I never saw or learned how the birds were prepared for eating, probably best that I didn't.

To all the grown ups, I was "Teacher" and that title seemed to discriminate me from some of their activities and conversations. At least I knew when to make myself absent or to find things to do in my own room.

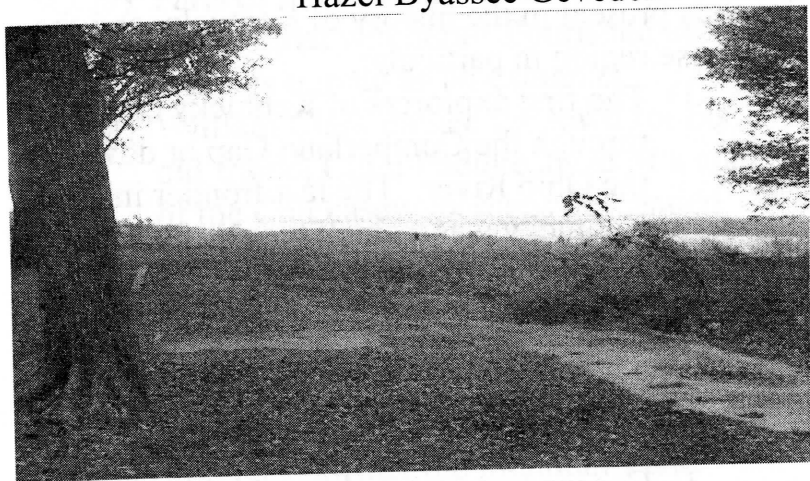
Spring arrived and with it a deep concern as to the "High Water." A daily and almost hourly check was made from the radio station in Cairo, Ill. Word came that we must evacuate, school was to be closed. That last day the kind old colored man took us to school in a row boat. The water was not deep enough to float the boat up to the steps, but it was too deep to walk in, so he carried each child from the tipsy boat to the top step and came back for me. The children were all dancing up and down saying, "Miss Hazel, Miss Hazel, don't fall, don't fall." Early in the afternoon someone came for us in a large boat. We all loaded in and the rest of the families were all ready to go to Columbus to dry land. How good it was

to get away from that "Mighty Mississippi" whose very looks and swishy sounds seemed to be reaching out to engulf whatever was in it's path.

For two weeks, we were all away from the place called "Wolf Island." When we returned there was much to do. Mud was everywhere but each day showed more drying and soon we were all back in our routine and looking forward to the real ending of school.

Now as I look back I would really like to know if I taught those children anything or was it just a "Day Care Center" for those who needed to be entertained. Time alone will tell. It was an experience that I do not regret. The old saying is: "Experience is the best teacher." So while I attempted to teach, I was being taught.

Hazel Byassee Geveden



Wolf Island